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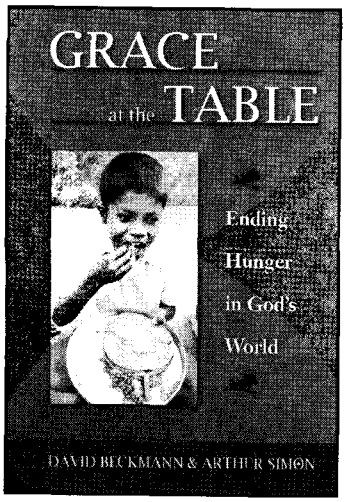

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COMMONWEAL

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To the Editors

Bad tactics

Re: your May 21 editorial, "Racial Politics," on the Amadou Diallo shooting in New York City.

Policemen firing forty-one bullets into a man from a distance of ten to fifteen feet is not merely a terrible tragedy, it is an example of disastrous police training and behavior that result when the police consider themselves an army of occupation trying to control a lawless mob.

Your citing the dramatically reduced crime statistics in New York City under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is specious. Crime is down throughout the United States (a booming economy will do that) and other major police forces have accomplished that without resorting to cowboy shootouts or brutalizing their minority citizens.

You cite Bob Herbert, the *New York Times* op-ed columnist (and an African-American) who said the shooting of Mr. Diallo was not murder. Presumably you take that from his April 4, 1999 column. But that column, commenting on aggressive policing in New York City, also said: "Innocent New Yorkers were stopped and frisked by the tens of thousands. Thousands more were dragged off to jail for the most minor offenses...traffic violations, drinking in public, riding a bicycle on the sidewalk."

Those weren't middle-class white New Yorkers being hassled by the police. Whites in New York aren't treated like that. Can you imagine what furor would have erupted if four African-American policemen emptied their weapons into a Hasidic man? It is the minorities who suffer police harassment and death. That has been the pattern in New York City for generations.

I have heard the justifications before: Minorities commit more crime than whites; minority communities want aggressive policing (a close friend, a New York City councilman and an African-American, would jail petty criminals for life if he thought he could get away with it!); we can't let barbarians get the upper hand, and accidents will happen.

It should be clear to even the most casual observer that the New York City police department is a force with many racists who may not hate minorities, they just think them subhuman. With that mindset, deaths and intentional brutalizations will always occur.

JOSEPH D. POLICANO
East Hampton, N.Y.

Mercy or justice?

Your May 21 editorial, "Racial Politics," touches on another hot-button issue. All of the distrust and resentment that float around loose just grabs at incidents like the Diallo shooting. The pull is so strong to name the problem people. Depending on the way one approaches these issues, some of the candidates might be: Brutal and racist police officers; opportunistic self-proclaimed leaders like Sharpton; political leaders, police department officials; criminals, drug dealers; anybody you like.

Your editorial is nuanced and looks at the situation from a number of angles. I don't find that you play to any of the easy negative pulls listed above. I enumerate them because I feel some of them myself.

Something that tugs on me is this three-part script that seems to happen over and over: Police officers kill someone in questionable circumstances; the officers account for their action by saying "I thought he was going for a gun"; that is the end of the matter.

This feels to me like impunity: Law enforcement gets to kill anybody, then say "I thought he was going for a gun." The fact that I know real situations are always more ambiguous than this doesn't get me out of the trap. Nor does knowing that law enforcement is a dangerous and maybe thankless profession. I can tell myself this, but the pull is to blame the cops and blame people like your editorial staff for wrapping up the matter by saying, "In other words, the Diallo killing does not appear to be the result of any systematic police brutality or racism." But perhaps it was unsystematic brutality and racism, and maybe the game is rigged so that police officers can count on getting away with murder, whether or not they are brutal or racist.

(Continued on page 30)

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Gore gets religion

Hillary Clinton's all-but-announced candidacy for the U.S. Senate in New York threatens to deprive Al Gore of a portion of the national political limelight as well as keep the Clinton scandals, from which the vice-president must distance himself, before the cameras and on the front pages of the tabloids. Not an enviable position for a presidential hopeful who is attempting the rare political feat of getting himself elected to the oval office after eight years as America's Prince of Wales. But whatever Gore's political problems—high on the list are a comical lack of charisma, allegations of campaign-finance shenanigans, and Texas Republican Governor George W. Bush—he is widely respected as a decent and thoughtful man. Both those traits were evident in a speech he gave last month at Atlanta's Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center. Gore, who spent a year in divinity school, is known as someone who takes his Baptist faith seriously. In Atlanta, he enunciated a convincing rationale for greater public funding of faith-based efforts to combat unemployment, drug addiction, homelessness, and other social problems.

Gore's so-called "New Partnership" between government and religious groups seems designed to give Americans United for the Separation of Church and State heart palpitations, but it is hardly a radical proposal. Republicans have been championing such initiatives, if soft-pedaling the idea of public funding, for years. It might even be said that Gore, taking a page from his White House mentor, is trying to co-opt yet another populist Republican issue. Governor Bush, it is readily pointed out, has already instituted a program in Texas that uses faith-based organizations to help welfare recipients. Nearly all the serious presidential candidates in both parties have endorsed the idea of such cooperation—none dare call it "entanglement"—and have given rhetorical support to the role religion and religious groups can play in the reinvigoration of civil society.

Yes, there is a danger that government funding will compromise the integrity of religious practice. There is also the danger that the bureaucratic regulation accompanying government funding will overwhelm some grassroots religious organizations. And as Gore carefully pointed out in his Atlanta speech, when religious groups accept public monies there must be strict safeguards against proselytizing or religious coercion. Government must not be seen to be endorsing any particular religion.

At the same time, it is undeniable that faith-based groups are often a school for citizenship and a stimulant of democratic participation. They have also demonstrated marked success in dealing with drug addiction and youth crime. In short, while government must guarantee freedom of religion, it is under no obligation to guarantee freedom *from* religion. It would be useful to push Gore a little harder on how he draws that line. If he believes, for instance, that public funding for faith-based programs in drug treatment does not violate the First Amendment's establishment clause, why is he opposed to vouchers that allow poor parents to choose faith-based schools for their children? If he thinks religious groups are essential to the health of democracy, why is he tone deaf to the concerns many religiously motivated people have about current abortion law? "A politics of com-

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munity can be strengthened when we are not afraid to make connections between spirituality and politics," Gore said in Atlanta. Amen to that. But in both politics and theology, the devil is in the details.

END GAME

Is the war over or not? While the world waits for the Yugoslav military to cut a deal with NATO, every complaint, paranoid and otherwise, about the war and the putative peace has made its way into print. At least on the domestic front, there are some Republicans who will never forgive a NATO victory because it will redound to the benefit of the man they love to hate, William Jefferson Clinton.

It is curious that an "end game" in Yugoslavia, which bears such a striking resemblance to the end of the Gulf War, should be the object of such criticism. In both conflicts the West agreed to end its war effort when the opposition (Saddam Hussein in Iran and Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia) agreed to meet its demands. In the Gulf War, Iran got out of Kuwait; in this war, Yugoslavia will (eventually) withdraw its military from Kosovo. In both cases the goals were limited, and in both cases neither President George Bush nor President Clinton was willing to enlarge them, for example, by insisting that Hussein or Milosevic had to go, or by directly invading Iran or Yugoslavia.

The willingness to abide by the original, and limited, goals may appear shortsighted because criminal regimes are left in place. But in a post-cold war world where coalition armies and international cooperation are necessities, it hardly seems likely that a larger war could be wrung from already reluctant allies, or that the success of such international peacekeeping should be jeopardized by unrealistic political ambitions.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE, Jr.

JOBS WORK

The best social policy

The United States has been conducting a great economic experiment. It involves keeping unemployment rates at a historic low, over a long period. The results are in: Sustained low unemployment achieves the good results its advocates have always claimed it would. Not only that: We've kept unemployment low without experiencing an upsurge of inflation.

Until the last few years, economic policy assumed that was impossible. Yet the jobless rate has fallen to 4.2 percent, a twenty-nine-year low—and inflation still seems at bay. Just as important, those who argued for years that the plight of the poor owed more to what was wrong with the economy than to what was wrong with the poor have been proved right. Tight labor markets have led employers to offer jobs to people who were described as "unemployable" only a few years ago.

Among the large beneficiaries of the low unemployment rates are young black men, according to a study by Richard B. Freeman of Harvard University and William M. Rogers at the College of William and Mary. They found that in fourteen metropolitan areas where unemployment has been below 4 percent since 1992, the proportion of young, less-educated black men who are working rose from 52 percent to 64 percent. Increased work has been accompanied by falling crime rates.

Low unemployment helps explain a recent spate of good journalism on the changing situation in black America, including Ellis Cose's important article in the June 7 *Newsweek* and a detailed report on the Freeman-Rogers study by Sylvia Nassar and Kirsten B. Mitchell in the May 23 *New York Times*. "Poor blacks never lost faith in work, education, and individual effort," Jennifer L. Hochschild of Princeton University told Nassar and Mitchell. "What's different now is that they can do something about it."

Economic thinkers of a New Deal bent have insisted for decades that if unemployment were low enough, many social problems described as "intractable" would begin solving themselves. The irony is that it took Bill Clinton, a Democratic president described as too conservative by many liberals, and Alan Greenspan, a Federal Reserve chief whose hero was the libertarian Ayn Rand, to prove the theory true.

Greenspan is described as a wizard, but he did something more important than magic: He altered his policies in light of the evidence. Greenspan, like most economists, once held the conventional view that low unemployment would breed inflation. But over time, he saw this economy behaving differently. Instead of hitting the brakes by raising interest rates, he held them steady and unemployment continued to drop.

Greenspan is now under pressure to raise rates. But he might consider the intriguing theory of Alice Rivlin, who stepped down in early June as vice-chairman of the Fed. She says we may

In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated July 16.

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be in a time when low unemployment keeps inflation *down* because it forces companies confronted with a shortage of workers to become more efficient. "Economists have had in their head the idea that tight labor markets would lead to inflation and low productivity," Rivlin told the *Financial Times* in April. "It may be that under the present circumstances of fierce global competition, the effect of tight labor markets is exactly the opposite."

Political progressives have been reluctant to tout the good news that they were right about low unemployment. Many in their ranks are more concerned with persistent inequalities and injustices. But admitting there's good news doesn't entail ignoring the bad. Acknowledging that low unemployment has been good for African-Americans, for example, doesn't mean racism has disappeared or that we've arrived at a utopian state of social justice. We haven't.

A study released this month by the 2030 Center, which studies the economic problems of young adults, found that half of all temporary workers, those who have insecure, "nonstandard jobs," are aged twenty to thirty-four. While some take temporary work because they want flexibility, the study found that the vast majority of temporary workers "profess strong dissatisfaction with their benefits and second-rate status." This is a problem. But it would only get worse if unemployment climbed back up.

Politicians will always talk about their devotion to economic growth. But now that we know what low unemployment can achieve, politicians need to be pressed about their priorities and what kind of growth they're looking for. Will their policies tilt toward keeping the jobless rate down? Or will their fears of inflation always make them tilt toward risking higher unemployment?

Yes, inflation is a risk. But it is now undeniable that the risks of high unemployment are borne most heavily by the poorest among us—those who are only now beginning to climb the economic ladder. We dare not knock that ladder down. □

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OF SEVERAL MINDS

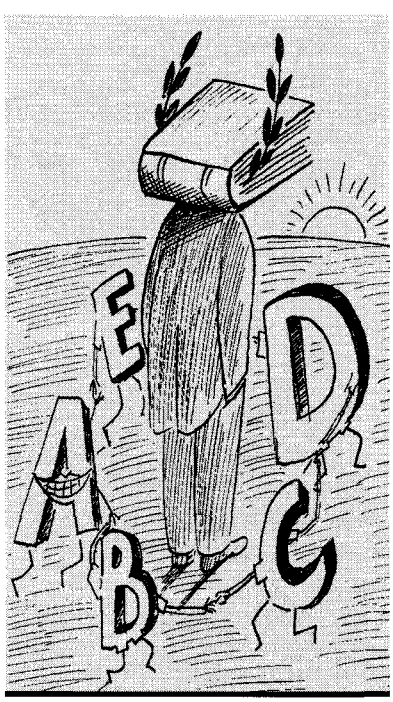
SIDNEY CALLAHAN

COME OUT AND PLAY?

I'd rather be reading

Readers of the world unite. Oprah loves you. She runs a book club and when she recommends a book it skyrockets to the top of the best-seller list. Full disclosure. I have never actually seen Oprah on TV with my own eyes, but I believe that she exists—and influences our world.

When Oprah endorsed *The Reader* by Bernard Schlink (Random House) sales soared; Amazon.com lists it as seventeenth in sales and provides 241 reviews by readers. I had already read the hardcover version and felt surprised by Oprah's choice. Schlink writes well but his tale is so austere that I had hesitated to pass the book on to my friends. Granted the story starts out with a lot of sex and includes a dramatic courtroom trial, but the heroine (?) Hanna is an enigmatic former concentration camp guard who goes to prison for war crimes rather than admit her illiteracy. In prison Hanna learns to read, but on her release neither she nor the detached narrator lives happily ever after. No mass appeal here, I would have thought.



I fancy myself a discriminating judge of people's taste in books because of my long years in the book-giving business. I buy new novels with reckless abandon (no delay of gratification), and justify my habit by passing the volumes on to the friends and family members who will like them. This practice solves the space problem and removes the physical evidence of extravagance. Dare we hope that Oprah will succeed in making reading and buying books A-OK, an activity not confined to "eggheads," "nerds," or "wonks"? All of my life I have been mildly persecuted for avid reading. "Put down that book and come out to play," has been the constant admonishment. My Southern family put a high priority on having fun, so in our family of two girls and two parents I was dragooned into endless games, starting with parchesi and ending with bridge. "Isn't it too bad we didn't have another child" they joked, "so Sidney could read?"

In my heart I knew that I'd rather be reading because it was really truly the most fun of all. Like Proust I now understand that reading is a form of friendship, and has a special merit: "In reading, friendship is suddenly brought back to its original purity. There is no false amiability with books. If we spend the evening with these friends it is because we genuinely want to."

I admit that there is a selfish side to the autonomous control available to readers. I predict that the printed word will never be replaced by electronic media because with paper in hand readers can race along, skip ahead, go back, pause, or plunk a book or article down nearby in the to-be-read-later pile. And all of this gets done quietly and peace-

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fully. No clicking, no beeping, no scrolling down or dialing up to reconnect. No passively waiting for the droning TV or movie plot to unfold or rewind.

Surely it's the self-enclosed ecstatic pleasure of reading that makes it suspect to extroverts. Few things can compete with the "high" provided by intensely immersing your mind in another mind's consciousness. You engage, focus, and grapple with the author's writing and then take off. As Proust says, the words the author has written may be his "conclusions," but for the reader they are "incitements." Reading concentrates the mind and incites us to new desires, new ideas, new plans for future action. Too dangerous and passionate an activity?

According to an obscure Freudian author I once happened upon in an academic tome, avid readers like myself suffer from "epistemophilia," or an excessive love of knowing. Such conditions result from sublimating the unconscious and forbidden desire to view the primal scene, that is, your parents' marital coupling! Oh me, what zany pellets of pseudowisdom you can find to chuckle over in omnivorous reading.

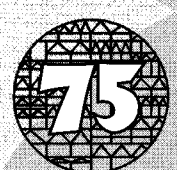
I thought it less funny, however, when a psychoanalyst I knew once asked me why I didn't just go into therapy rather than pursue my desire to go to graduate school? His idea of a joke? Or some leftover shards from Freud's broken-down theory that intellectual women deny their femininity by masculine protest? Unfortunately, I could probably never convince such skeptics that after I'd had six children in ten years and reared them in turbulent circumstances, nothing could equal the bliss of having time to read and write. Graduate school is a trip to the amusement park compared to the arduous work of mothering and homemaking.

This truth leads to the final accusation hurled at readers. They (we) use books as an escape from life, or what's called "real life." Well, this charge can sometimes be accurate. The ill and thwarted Fosca, heroine in Stephen Sondheim's *Passion*, sings, "I do not read to think, I do not read to learn, I do not read to search for truth...I read to dream...to get away from life." Desperately unhappy, this lost lady reads "to fly, to skim...I do not read to swim."

At times reading may be the opium of the educated. The addiction can begin as unhappy (or bored) children seek solace in reading through their local library. My cousin Diane, who is the eldest daughter in a good Alabama Baptist brood of ten children, remembers her obsessive reading began in order to escape the din during a horrific family car excursion to Williamsburg. But, as so often happens, you start out reading to fly, and end up swimming. Diane, alone of all her siblings and high school classmates, went on to get her Ph.D.

No, once thoroughly immersed, constant readers aim not to flee from the world but to dive in and try to learn everything in the world worth knowing. With the goal of omniscience firmly in place you can embark upon an endless voyage, and never become beached in boredom. As Arthur Krystal writes in the spring issue of the *American Scholar*, you should try to reach the proper parameters of knowledge even when forced to admit "I'm not entirely sure what I do need to know." Yet, without enough facts and information, "one cannot begin to understand how the end of the second millennium came to have the shape and temper it has." No excuses accepted. Get thee to the library and read. □

From the archives



Throughout 1999, Commonweal *will be celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the March 23, 1952 issue is "The Meaning of Majority Rule," by John Hallowell.*

What is demanded by the democratic form of government is not submission to the will of the majority because that will is numerically superior but rather submission to the reasoned judgment of the majority. We are obligated to submit to the decision of the majority not because that decision represents a numerically superior will but because it represents the best judgment of society with respect to a particular matter at a particular time. It is founded not upon the principle that the will of the many should prevail over the will of the few but rather upon the principle that the judgment of the many is likely to be superior to the judgment of the few.

The principle of majority rule is founded upon the belief that the widest possible popular discussion and deliberation is likely to yield wiser decisions than a discussion limited to a few. The decision recorded by majority vote may then be fairly said to represent not a portion of society but the whole people. Democracy attempts to implement the principle that government should rest upon the consent of the people by making provision for the widest possible popular deliberation and participation in the formulation of public policy....

JOHN HALLOWELL

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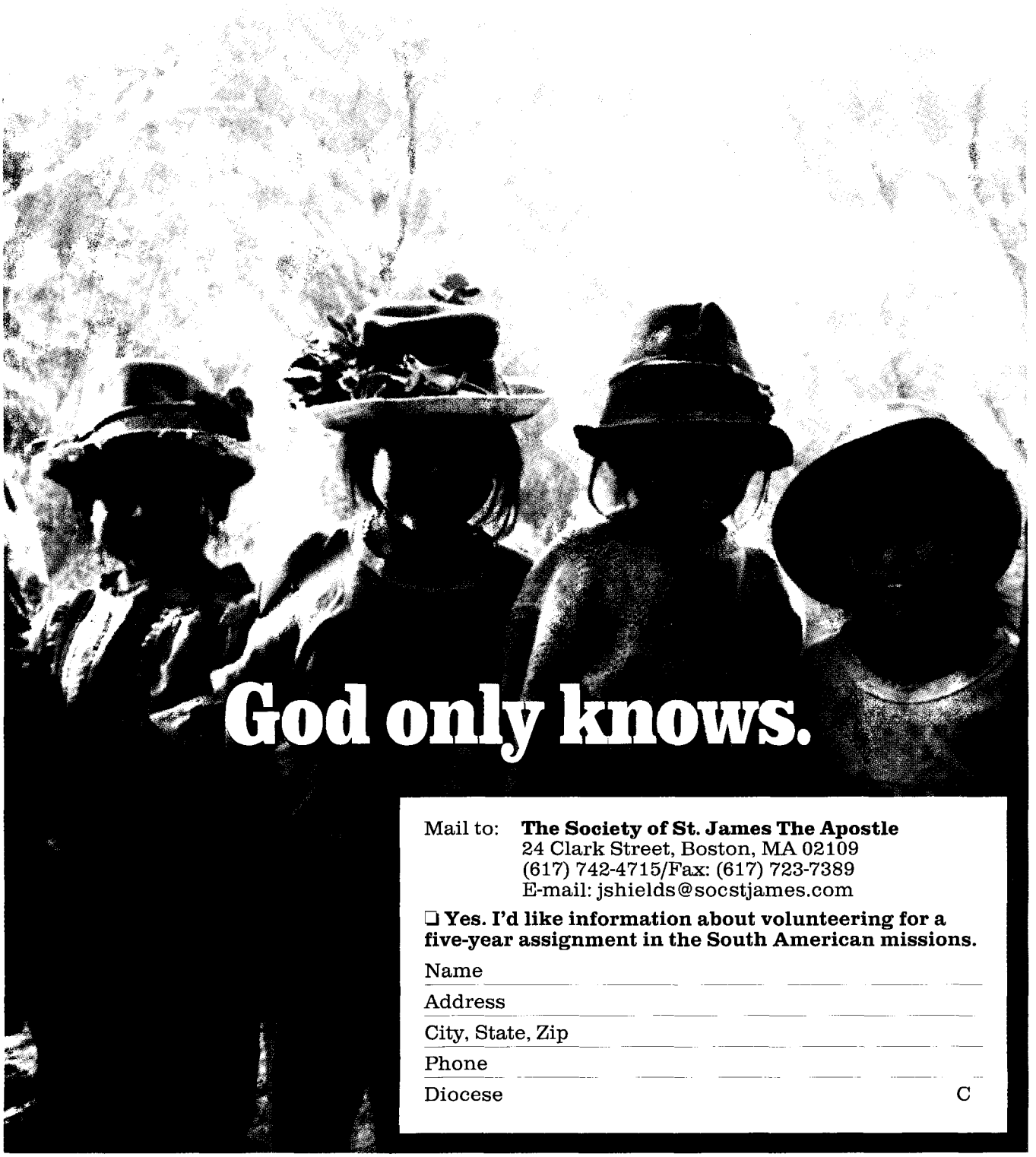

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Jo McGowan

BURNING CHRISTIANS

India's BJP gets out the vote

You could almost feel sorry for the BJP, India's ruling party and a bastion of Hindu militancy. After successfully whipping the country into virtual hysteria on Hindu-Muslim lines, reminding the nation at every opportunity of the ever-present danger of Pakistan at the northern border and the always questionable loyalties of India's Islamic citizens, it turned its attention to the Christians.

Here, understandably, was a real challenge: Christians constitute a tiny minority of the Indian population (a mere 2.34 percent) and there have rarely been serious tensions between them and the Hindu majority (85 percent). There is no neighboring Christian state to cause unease and Christians in India, although some are clannish and inclined to think themselves a bit better than the rest of the country, are generally apolitical, almost to a fault. Finally, just about everyone, regardless of politics, holds them in high regard for their selfless and superb contributions to the country's health-care and educational institutions. Even BJP leaders scramble like everyone else to get their children admitted to convent schools.

Why, then, should the BJP be so eager to convince the Hindu majority that Christians pose a real and significant threat to the integrity of the nation? It is a puzzle.

The answer lies in the precarious state of Indian politics and the rapidly shifting loyalties of the electorate. With so many parties vying for power, even a single seat in Parliament counts and areas previously written off as not worth the trouble have become scenes of feverish activity by party workers of every persuasion. In states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa, the BJP and non-BJP parties have almost equal strengths. To secure the leading edge, the BJP strategy is crude but effective: Since the main voting bloc in the country is the Hindu one, the party does all it can to create a siege mentality, us against them, and then present itself as the only true Hindu voice. This has worked successfully wherever it has been used against Muslims, but in the case of Christians, the hostility just wasn't strong enough.The issue the BJP finally fixed upon was conversions. Linked as they are to missionaries with ties to foreign countries, the issue began to be presented as one of patriotism: converting to Christianity could be seen as a change of nationality. In the words of Praveen Togadia, a leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (an international affiliate of the BJP), "Conversions challenge our national unity."

Conversions certainly do take place wherever Christians are active. Interestingly, Catholic missionaries are seen as more interested in schools and hospitals and less in proselytizing than their Protestant counterparts, but both admit openly that the people they work with do convert. Father Anthony, a Catholic priest working in the Dang area of Gujarat, scene of terrible anti-Christian violence some months ago, considers himself a messenger of Christ, "but not to those who don't want it. A change of heart is necessary for real conversion. [Anything else] is hypocrisy."

Whether hearts are changed or not is of little concern to the BJP; it's more interested in counting votes. In the process, poor, illiterate tribespeople like the Bhils in Gujarat, may be raped and murdered, their homes destroyed, their churches burnt, but their anguish is of no real concern. Nor does the BJP really care about their religious convictions. Until they became pawns in the BJP power games, the Dang area was among the most neglected in the entire country.

The sudden, unfortunate appearance of the Bhil community on the national scene had to do not with them as individuals but with what they represented: a chance for the BJP to present its case against any "outside" (that is, non-Hindu) forces within India. In other states, notably Orissa, where an Australian missionary and his two young sons were burnt to death as they slept in their Jeep, and in Madhya Pradesh, where a group of nuns were beaten and raped and their convent pillaged, the situation was no better: Churches were demolished, Bibles burnt, priests beaten, and schools ransacked.

And almost without exception, state and local authorities reacted as if the Christians were the ones at fault. The nuns were instructed by the police not to file rape charges as it would give the area a bad name. And the president of the BJP, reacting to the killings of Graham Staines, the Australian missionary, and his two little boys, said "I appeal to the missionaries that they are sitting on a stack of hay. They had better be careful."

Anti-Christian violence in India, then, is not really about Christianity. It is about power. Just as with racism in the United States, religious and communal passions are painfully easy to incite here (it was a common tactic of the British as well) and the BJP has no scruples about doing it if it will win the party those crucial few seats it requires. So Christians in India who find their homes being burnt and their churches destroyed can at least comfort themselves that it isn't personal. □

Jo McGowan, *an American who lives in India, is founder of Karuna Vihar, a school for children with special needs in Dehra Doon.*

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MONEY & MEDICAL CARE

Where resources & needs conflict

Christopher F. Koller

There is a morbid race going on in health policy in the United States—a game of "chicken." The question is, what will force us to confront our limited health-care resources first: the demographic bubble of aging baby boomers who will break the Medicare bank or the growing number of people with no health insurance?

As Americans, we appear to want all to get all the medical care they need. While we set up public insurance for the most vulnerable—Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for poor women and children—we don't have faith in the government to pull it off for all of us. So we rely on privately financed health insurance and we subsidize free or reduced-cost care for those who cannot afford it.

These efforts, though, have never been enough. Good medical treatment does not exist without a steady way to pay for it. People without health insurance postpone needed preventive care and medical treatment (over half of all adults without health insurance have no regular source of care), and as a result have poorer health. Community health centers—the traditional free clinics—have always struggled to meet great demand with limited funding. Hospital emergency departments have become triage centers for uninsured people who show up for nonemergency care, knowing that while they will have to wait, they will not be turned away. Treatment and follow-up care for an uninsured person can vary dramatically from what an insured person with the same condition receives, and, finally, medical-care debts can saddle patients for years after treatment.

Get a job

Historically, the uninsured were usually the unemployed. Get a job and you'd get your health insurance. Good labor policy was good health policy. But that strong connection between employment and health coverage is weakening. The number of uninsured continues to rise even as unemployment rates drop to theoretical lows. And the uninsured find that their health costs are rising at a time when there are fewer subsidies available to treat them. What happened to the deal that a job meant health insurance? How did we get here and how do we get out?

Some figures. From 1987 to 1996 the number of people under the age of sixty-five without health insurance rose by 10 million, to more than 41 million. Moreover, in the last two years, one in every three people experienced a break in health insurance coverage, and that break was usually for longer than a year's time.

Who are the people without health insurance? Most are adults and most are not poor (80 percent of the uninsured have family incomes above the poverty level, and almost half of them are from families with incomes twice the poverty level). They are disproportionately nonwhite (even accounting for age, work status, and income). Most significant, more and more are employed. There are 22 million workers—17 percent of the workforce—without health insurance. Fifty percent of people without health insurance are from families with a full-time worker; another 25 percent are from families with a part-time or part-year worker.

What has happened to employment-based health insurance? From 1987 to 1995, in a period of economic expansion, the proportion of Americans with workplace health coverage dropped 5 percentage points. Why the decline? Two reasons:

"Medicare insisted that we come up with an economy model pacemaker."

Christopher F. Koller *is chief executive officer of Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, an HMO serving primarily Medicaid enrollees.*

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We began making fundamentally different kinds of jobs; and our health-care costs went through the roof.

- Different jobs. Compared to earlier periods of employment growth, our new jobs were more likely to be in smaller businesses, nonunionized industries, temporary employment, or the service sector. Historically these sectors have been less likely to provide health insurance to their employees. Moreover, they produce lower-wage jobs, which means employees are less likely to be able to afford to pay their share of a health-insurance premium.

- Rising costs. The annual rate of health-care inflation has averaged just under *twice* the general rate of inflation for the past ten years, and is accelerating rapidly. Simply put, treatments cost much more than they used to, we are using more of them, and our insurance rates reflect that reality. Choose your factor and it probably contributes: more available technologies, more seniors, vain baby boomers who consider aging a disease, more doctors, inefficient administration, and a pharmaceutical industry that generates record profits in the name of scientific progress and turns novelties into rights (Viagra as a mental-health benefit, anyone?).

Health care now consumes nearly 15 percent of our gross domestic product. We have all paid the cost of increased medical care in larger Medicare and Medicaid payments, and in the costs of medical goods and services purchased. At the same time, employers have sought to shift some of the higher cost for health insurance to employees by increasing cost sharing for insurance policies, reducing benefits, or simply dropping coverage altogether. The burden has fallen disproportionately on low-wage workers. A study sponsored by the Kaiser Commission estimated that between 1987 and 1996, the percentage of poor workers covered by employer health insurance dropped by 12 percentage points (compared to five points for all workers). It attributed the decline to two major factors: fewer of these employees were offered health insurance (a 5-point decline); and fewer were able to afford what they were offered (a 13-point decline in the percentage of workers participating in the employer's plan).

Health-insurance cost increases have also landed disproportionately on small employers. Unable to command volume discounts from insurers and excluded when large employers demand "experience rating," where insurers set premiums based on the costs of care of one specific group, these small businesses are regularly quoted significantly higher prices than their larger peers for similar benefit packages. The results: Small businesses are more likely to forgo insurance all together, or, if they do offer it, to pass on the higher costs to their employees. Consider the ramifications: A 25-percent cost sharing on a family health-insurance premium (a fairly standard figure), can result in a gross wage reduction of $1 per hour—hard to absorb for many low-income families earning less than $15 an hour. Moreover, this contribution will only increase over the years and potentially lower take-home pay—since medical inflation outstrips wage hikes. Thus health insurance, which once was considered an implicit right for the employed, has become a regressive, and often unaffordable, tax.

Historically, the uninsured were usually the unemployed. Get a job and you'd get your health insurance. Good labor policy was good health policy. But that strong connection between employment and health coverage is weakening.

Without major policy shifts, future prospects are grim. The effect of medical cost inflation on employment-based health insurance will continue to be devastating. In the March issue of *Health Affairs*, economists estimate that an average per capita increase in health-care spending of 5.5 percent would increase the proportion of uninsured workers to 27 percent by 2005, up from 17 percent today. This assumes no economic slowdown. Whenever that happens—and it will—more people will be out of work and the overall percentage of uninsured will increase even further.

What is to be done?

A charity-based system of medical care in the United States has never been up to the task of meeting all the needs of the medically uninsured. It does not provide adequate preventive care, cannot insure good treatment or consistent follow-up care, and most important, does not reach all the people who need it. The system certainly cannot meet the increasing demands being placed on it. If we believe everybody should get the care they need, then our society has an obligation not only to help provide basic health care but to offer basic health insurance. Without the ability to pay, access will never be adequate.

There are numerous incremental reforms being implemented to improve access to health care. Some states, in the wake of the spectacular failure of the 1996 Clinton health-care initiative, have stealthily made inroads on the uninsured population by expanding Medicaid eligibility to families with incomes 250 or even 300 percent above the poverty line, and by matching federal funds with state money. Several years ago Congress passed the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), releasing huge amounts of federal matching funds to states to design their own health-insurance programs for the nation's 10 million uninsured kids. But the results have been mixed. Some states have produced cautious programs, while most have had difficulty locating eligible children.

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Medicaid and CHIP remain family programs: Childless, able-bodied adults are ineligible. The most progressive states are now looking to develop programs to promote coverage by employers. They are talking about increasing the leverage of small businesses in purchasing medical insurance, and even supplementing their premiums. Some states are also seeking to reduce inequities in how insurers price the same benefit package for different businesses. But state-based efforts—such as rating reform, Medicaid eligibility expansion, and public/private purchasing efforts—cannot address regional differences in the rates of the uninsured. For example, Southern and certain Western states are strikingly parsimonious in their Medicaid benefits. The result is that they have and will continue to have higher rates of uninsured. Moreover, even those states with low rates of uninsured people are seeing these trends increase because of the effect of health-care cost inflation on employer health programs.

Much of the federal debate is uninspired. Many federal proposals try to use tax policy as social reform, letting individuals—like their employers—purchase health insurance with pre-tax dollars. Such efforts will have little effect; the market for individual insurance is anemic, since insurers know that in a nonmandatory environment the only people who will pay the full cost of health insurance are those who will probably use more than their share. How many drivers would go without auto insurance if it were an option?

The need for wholesale reform to reduce the number of uninsured seems clear. At present, efforts run in two directions: (1) universal health-care coverage; (2) attacking the root cause of cost inflation by creating a better market for health-care coverage, one in which consumers who bear the costs make the most efficient purchasing and utilization decisions.

Universal coverage could be achieved through government mandates on employers or by single-payer programs. However, European and Canadian systems have shown that universal coverage is not immune to the underlying cost pressures being felt in health care today. Policy makers there are looking to introduce some sort of cost-based competition or at least a patient-based payment to create some price cost sensitivity. On the other side, free-market advocates have limited experience and a poor track record in creating positive market conditions for health insurance. Health care is not really a commodity and its complexity makes for a tough market transaction. More important, in every market there exists distributional inequality—exactly the problem we are trying to correct.

The U.S. political structure embraces incrementalism. Short of wholesale reform, federal efforts should build on the current structure of mixing federal and state funds to support state-based programs. This funding should be extended to adults and built into employment-based subsidies. Federal efforts should also attempt—by incentives or mandates—

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to eliminate the wide variation in the rate of uninsured which exists among the states.

But if the number of uninsured remains inextricably linked with the rising costs of medical care, the fundamental issue is that we cannot afford the treatment options available and have not figured out a way to limit our choices. The amount of money involved is so mind-boggling and the resource-allocation decisions and so painful that no wholesale reform is possible without some significant oxen being gored. It was just this prospect in the early 1990s that caused us to flinch and let the private sector work its invisible hand in the form of health maintenance organizations. While managed care has the capacities to reduce clinical practice variation and improve health outcomes in the population, it does nothing to improve access and its gains have come at great public mistrust. It too seems defenseless against the rising tide of more options, more demands, and thus rising costs.

What will force us to acknowledge the chasm between the medical options we want and those we can afford? Daniel Callahan has written presciently of the changes required—a shift in personal and collective attitudes concerning mortality and aging, and a recognition of the limits and finite resources of any medical system. We need to look for opportunities to inform our policies and our choices with this thinking. How do we fund research and development in health care? How can we promote hospice and nursing alternatives, limit federal and private health-insurance benefits, and influence the number and nature of physician-training programs? How do we decide what health-care facilities are built and how to shape the market for diagnostic testing and pharmaceuticals? It even gets personal: When is the last time we exercised? Have we talked with our family members about how we want to die?

A 25-percent cost sharing on a family health-insurance premium can result in a gross wage reduction of $1 per hour—hard to absorb for many low-income families earning less than $15 an hour.

The 22 million workers in the United States, the 10 million children, and the 9 million others who now delay needed medical care because they lack coverage live marginalized in financial uncertainty and a societal no man's land. They should not have to wait for most of us to grow old before the nation takes notice of their plight. □

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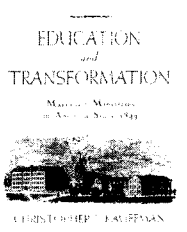

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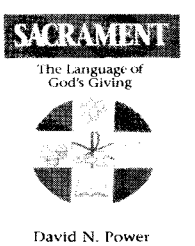

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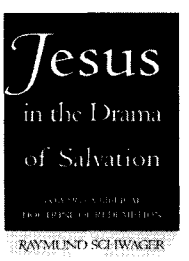

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THE WAR IN KOSOVO

Pacifism & ethnic cleansing

Eileen Egan

The long line of the newly homeless, the men, women, and children brutally thrust from their homes in Kosovo, Yugoslavia, face us in the press and fill television screens. Harrowing scenes fasten on the heart, the agony of a weary old woman being trundled in a wheelbarrow or that of a young woman giving her breast to her baby while continuing the march. An answering agony springs up in the viewer.

The ethnic Albanians, almost all Muslims, are being systematically expelled from Kosovo in an ethnic cleansing devised by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic and carried out by the army of Serbia. Now almost 1 million refugees are begging for entry into the poor places of Europe—Albania and Macedonia. They tell of rapes, executions, and massacres by the soldiers. The Serbs, fiercely loyal to the Orthodox church, see in their Muslim neighbors a reminder of the Serb defeat by Muslim armies six hundred years ago and their long travail in subjection to the Ottoman Empire. The holy places of the Serbs, and the place from which they take their identity, are in Kosovo.

My mind travels back to an earlier ethnic cleansing. I refer to the mass expulsion from Eastern Europe at the end of World War II more than 12 million people of German ethnic origin. They were herded into a destroyed and truncated West Germany. The sufferings and uncounted deaths of the expellees were given minimal attention in the press. Their fate had been decided, along with the redrawing of borders, at the Yalta Conference. As a member of a voluntary agency, Catholic Relief Services, I was present in West Germany in those years, and I heard accounts of the horrors inflicted on these people, and the immeasurable sufferings they endured.

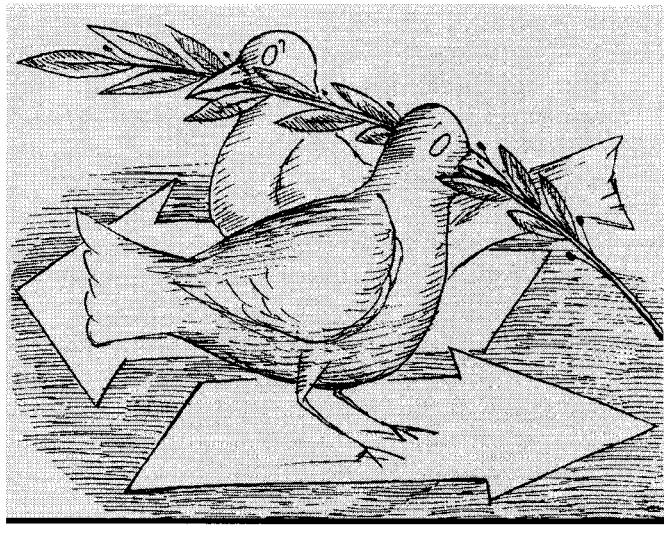
The situation of the uprooted in 1999 is mightily different. The compassion of millions around the world has been aroused by seeing at first hand what some human beings are forced to undergo when torn from their homes.

This time a remedy was at hand to stop the depredations of the Serb armies. Following sessions which were presumed to be negotiations, the NATO alliance decided to launch its first war. On March 24, with Americans flying most of the aircraft and firing most of the missiles, air strikes began against Yugoslavia. Many American citizens, as well as the citizens of such nations as England, Germany, and France, asked the question: Do not justice and a common humanity call for support of so just a cause? Are not nations justified in employing military means in a moral response to the evil of unchecked ethnic cleansing?

The answer, which may seem heartless, but which I give from the bottom of my conscience, is "No." On the pragmatic level, the air strikes initially increased the number of Kosovars made shelterless by army actions. The inacurracy of air and missile strikes soon became news. Errant bombs and missiles terrified the inhabitants of Kosovo as they landed on homes, markets, bridges, a hospital, and refugee convoys. One bomb strayed over the border into Bulgaria, another struck the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

My refusal to accept the response of violence arises from my conviction, that of a pacifist, and by the grace of God, a Catholic pacifist. I am aware that the term pacifist is poorly accepted (and poorly understood) among Catholics. To many it denotes passivity, a refusal to struggle for God's kingdom and his justice along with the generality of citizens, in wartime, for example. In my vision, pacifism consists of the daily acceptance of the struggle for God's kingdom and his justice by nonviolent means. My response to a personal attack, or to a call for participation at any stage of the social organization known as war, would be the same: gospel nonviolence. What was problematic in the just-war tradition, which the church taught for fifteen hundred years following the nonviolent teaching of the first few hundred years of the church's existence, is that, regrettably, it was captured by the nations, as every war was declared just by the warring party, which was then empowered to draft its people to maim and kill in good conscience.

More and more Catholics in the nuclear age are proclaiming themselves pacifists. The former secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Department of Social Develop-



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ment and World Peace, J. Bryan Hehir, pointed out that after John XXIII, Catholic teaching on peace has been in a state of movement. "The principal development," he asserted, "has been the legitimization of a pacifist perspective as a method for evaluating modern warfare." The Second Vatican Council was a prime source of this movement, particularly by validating conscientious objection to military service and the witness of nonviolence.

What vision brings me to a rejection of NATO air strikes to remedy the Kosovo crisis, and in fact, to the rejection of violence in Vietnam, the Gulf War, Grenada, and Panama?

First of all, the undergirding of my vision is seeing every human person, enemy or friend, as a child of God, a repository of the divine. Each one is a sacrosanct being, imaging in a unique way the Creator. To live by pacifism, we try to love our neighbors, near and far, friendly or unfriendly, as persons for whom a Person died. When Jesus commanded us to love one another as he has loved us, he was calling for an imitation of his sacrificial, redeeming love. We know that it is by his blood that we have been redeemed "from every tribe or tongue, from every nation and people." Paul reminds us that as followers of Jesus we become "new creatures," putting aside the concerns and desires of the "old creature." We would place among the marks of the old creature an undue love and attachment to tribe and nation. The honor due God was wrongly given to the nation.

The gospel of Jesus is often lost in the adulation of the nation and its power. Such weapons of the spirit as prayer, fasting, and peaceful resistance are puny things indeed in contrast to the strength and might of armies. Yet the weapons of the spirit are all that the pacifist has. A leading pacifist of our century, Dorothy Day, asserted the power of the spirit of Jesus at the opening of World War II. "Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount," she announced in the *Catholic Worker*. "We will continue our pacifist stand."

In the Sermon on the Mount we find the core of Jesus' teaching and the basis for a pacifist perspective on war. In the Beatitudes we are told that the merciful are blessed and will themselves be shown mercy. War is about mercilessness; soldiers in uniform must obey orders to maim and kill the enemy, to destroy his home, to prevent food from reaching him. Modern warfare, in contradistinction to earlier wars which interrupted the performance of the works of mercy, now reverses them, a betrayal of the relationship between human beings that was taught by Jesus. In order to keep mercy before our eyes, Jesus told us he is the hungry one, the thirsty one, the shelterless one, the one who is suffering, the one in captivity. Jesus is the suffering enemy in every war.

For the Catholic pacifist, the ultimate basis for refusing to participate in violence against human beings is the Eucharist. Jesus' legacy to his followers is the Table of the Lord where they can partake of his body and blood, thus becoming one with the Lord and closer to each other than to their own mothers. How could the followers of Jesus partake of his body and blood and then proceed to destroy the bodies and shed the blood of any of God's children?

Dorothy Day went to the Table of the Lord daily. To her, many of us owe our persistence in pacifism, our insistence that pacifism was a tenable position for the Catholic, long before it was accepted by church authorities. Day reminded us that it was the just-war concepts of a great Roman, Cicero, that helped Saints Ambrose and Augustine fashion their conditions for just war. It was Day who stayed with the words of Jesus, above all in the Sermon on the Mount, and led us from the teachings of Cicero to the teachings that came from the lips of the Messiah.

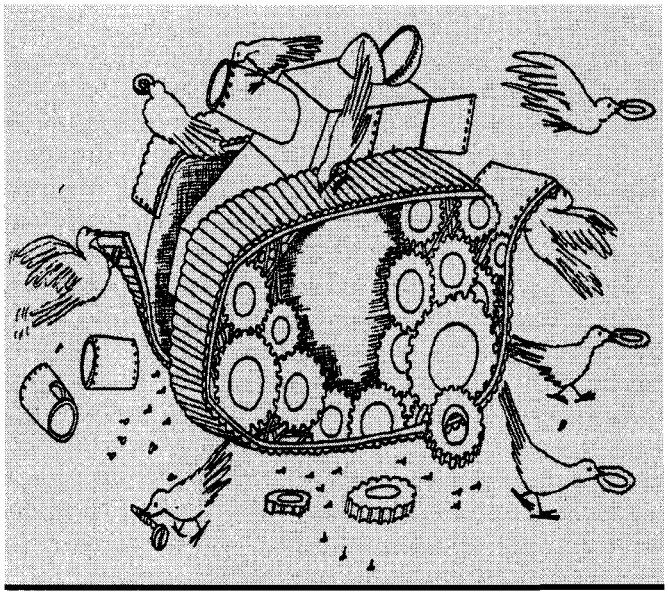
Eileen Egan's *most recent book is* Peace Be with You: Justified War or the Way of Nonviolence *(Orbis)*.

Patrick Jordan

These are the notes of a quasi-pacifist, that is, of one who is not sure he is one.

Over the past fifteen years, as a member of the *Commonweal* staff, I have found myself at odds with editorial policy on nuclear deterrence, the Gulf War, continued sanctions against Iraq, and the present bombardment of Serbia. Yet I remain at the magazine. Is it out of moral lassitude (I do need a job, I tell myself), or principle? (One's life as a pacifist, after all, means losing a lot of arguments.)

But stay I do because *Commonweal* provides an unusual forum for the reasoned discussion of such issues. And while I do not always agree with the journal's positions, I admire its openness and my colleagues' integrity. I am quite aware of their struggles with these issues. For it seems to me the just-war theory, which they generally hold, fails finally to provide much defense for its adherents, let alone an incontrovertible authority. The theory's elements always seem to be flopping out there like disparate pieces of medieval armor, their bearers like unsteady knights trying to hold them all to-



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gether. Think of the varying and changing parts: the requirements of just cause, proper authority, last option, cost of probable victory, proportionality, civilian immunity, sufficient means, changing goals, not to mention human entropy. Then there is the matter of choosing between Christ and Cicero. Even the most carefully crafted conditional acceptance of violence authorized by the just-war criteria leaves one some leagues from Nazareth. Finally, there are all the unintended consequences: not only of the particular war, but of the theory itself which historically has provided justification to prepare for the *next* war.

The pacifist, whose act of faith starts at a different pole, finds himself/herself nonetheless with a similar moral and intellectual dilemma. One may have concluded that the cross teaches a radically different manner of dealing with violence than Augustine, but that does not resolve the concrete problem of what to do about Milosevic. Further, the pacifist respects the courage and the moral probity of those who resist tyranny, particularly those ready to shed their own blood in the service of honor and the defense of others.

But despite granting these points, the pacifist maintains the belief that there is an inherent contradiction in trying to make peace through violence; that there is an intricate, unimpeachable connection between ends and means; and that there is no substitute for example when it comes to creating an alternative model to violent conflict resolution.

Even so, the pacifist also remains in moral free fall. For despite all the staunch axioms, the pacifist recognizes their practical tenuousness: If the logic of pacifism is to act so as to become what you want the other fellow to be, it seldom happens that either side of that equation is achieved.

From this follows the pacifist's greatest conundrum: How in the face of a Milosevic—and before the eyes of a million refugees—does one continue to adhere to a belief in nonviolence? The only final answer, if it is an answer, is to *throw* yourself and the world about you into the bleeding arms of Christ. His mercy, his endurance, his faith, his cross. That cross means resisting evil with good: By writing, protesting, welcoming the displaced, questioning the war makers, and resisting the crimes (and criminals) that unleash war.

Pacifists—but certainly not pacifists alone—must work to establish a competent authority to resolve international conflicts and to prevent acts of genocide. That will happen only after careful preparation on all levels. It will require a proliferation of groups—small as well as large—working to create alternatives to war. For starters, I look to grassroots bodies like the Sant' Egidio community, the Bruderhof, the Catholic Workers, Amnesty International. I hope for a renewed, strengthened United Nations. And I look to an Eileen Egan and a Jim Douglass, who worked behind the scenes at Vatican II to facilitate a change in the church's teaching on conscientious objection and to clarifying the church's stand against nuclear war. Such developments were mighty acts of the Holy Spirit. We need many more.

Patrick Jordan *is* Commonweal*'s managing editor.*

James W. Douglass

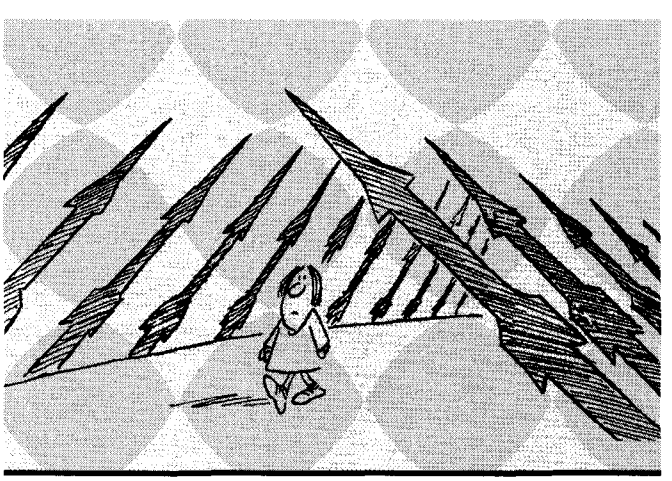
In March 1994, I stood in Republic Square in Belgrade in support of a courageous group of Serbian peacemakers, Women in Black. The women were holding their weekly vigil in resistance to Slobodan Milosevic's policies of ethnic cleansing, then decimating Bosnia and Croatia and increasingly threatening Kosovo.

Dressed in black for the victims of war, the Serbian women were regularly attacked by their fellow citizens. Yet every Wednesday afternoon they publicly stood their ground with smiles and banners. They then organized for peace the rest of the week out of an unidentified office that was often moved for security reasons. But even such limited spaces for peacemaking in Belgrade have now been politically demolished by our bombs.

Stasha Zajovic, one of those Women in Black, sums up in a recent e-mail letter the plight of current Serb and Kosovar peacemakers: "This conspiracy of militarism—global and local—dangerously reduces our space. Soon there won't be this space. With the horror the people of Kosovo are experiencing in this NATO intervention, they are paying a price even greater than before: NATO in the sky; Milosevic on the ground."

Veran Maric, leader of Radio B92, another dissident Belgrade group I visited in 1994, writes that the grassroots movement which struggled against Milosevic for years feels betrayed by the NATO bombs: "These people now feel compelled to take up arms and join their sons serving in the army. With bombs falling all around, nobody can persuade them—though some have tried—that this is only an attack on their government and not on their country."

Kosovo's own massive nonviolent resistance to Milosevic was driven into political oblivion by the West even before our planes started bombing. For most of the 1990s, the Albanian Kosovars waged a remarkable nonviolent struggle against Serbian oppression with strikes, marches, widespread noncooperation, and even their own parallel government, schools, and medical clinics. For a while Milosevic seemed stymied by the Kosovar popular movement. But it



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received little support from the Western governments and was demoralized by the Dayton peace agreement.

With the November 1995 Dayton accords, the United States made a deal with Milosevic on Bosnia that failed to secure autonomy for Kosovo, yet recognized Bosnian borders created by ethnic cleansing. Dayton's lesson was that violence pays. It encouraged Milosevic to intensify the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, while spurring the rise of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The KLA then provided a convenient military rationale for Milosevic's razing all of Kosovo.

But what alternative international response might there have been to the policies of Milosevic? How could the struggling peace movements of Serbia and Kosovo have been effectively supported by the West, rather than ignored, driven to violence, and now bombed into oblivion?

Let us consider the following proposal for a nonviolent intervention in Kosovo, issued in late March by Nashville peace activists Karl Meyer, Pam Beziar, and Angela Schindler:

- As the conflict began to develop, the United Nations Security Council would define the principles for UN intervention and a just settlement.
- The secretary general would begin to assemble a "nonviolent army" to be led by influential world figures such as (a) religious leaders including bishops delegated by the pope, Orthodox patriarchs, Islamic, and Jewish leaders; (b) Nobel Peace Prize winners, such as former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, the Dalai Lama, Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Northern Ireland, President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa; (c) retired world leaders such as Jimmy Carter and Mikhail Gorbachev; (d) diplomats from Russia and all the other European neighbors of Yugoslavia; (e) experienced activists trained in nonviolent tactics, such as veterans of the civil rights movement and Christian peacemaker teams that have worked in the West Bank and Haiti.
- In the case of Kosovo, this nonviolent brigade would have been divided into two units. One would have gone to Serbia to engage in dialogue with all sectors of civil society; the other would have gone to Kosovo to interpose itself between Serbian forces and the KLA and to begin dialogue and mediation between them.

The realistic assumption behind the Nashville proposal was that the power of a government is dependent on the support and cooperation of its people. For that reason nonviolent resistance based on truth and supported by the world community can dislodge any unjust government's popular support. Milosevic's hold on power was in fact shaky before the Dayton agreement and the NATO bombing. The Serbian and Kosovar nonviolent movements were threatening his power.

Is the primary obstacle to nonviolent alternatives in Kosovo and elsewhere our own attitude that only violence can respond to violence?

James W. Douglass *is the author of* The Nonviolent Coming of God *(Orbis).* □

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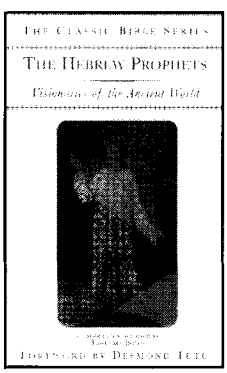

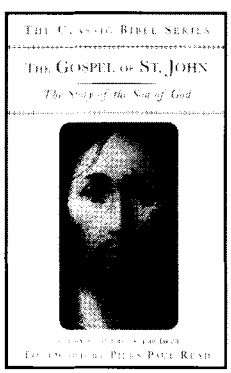

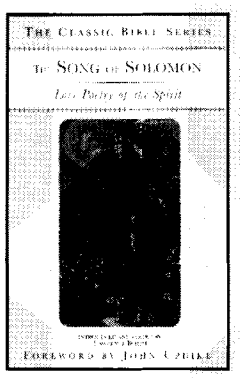

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Richard Alleva

REWORKING SHAKESPEARE

'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

Judged by the film he has made from it, two elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seem to have fascinated the director Michael Hoffman nearly to the exclusion of everything else in the play: the supernatural sylvan community ruled by Oberon and Titania, and the character of Bottom the weaver.

Up to the moment when the camera enters the forest, this production is a typical example of the cute modernization of Shakespeare. Instead of ancient Athens, Hoffman sets the story in an imaginary Tuscan town called Monte Athena at the turn of the century. Its ruler, Theseus, is no warrior hero but a harassed bureaucrat, and his bride-to-be, Hippolyta, is a bluestocking chafed by masculine traditions. The men wear boaters and the women corsets; bicycles and phonographs are important props; the music of Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi fills the soundtrack.

As usual with such modernizations, some things in the play fit the director's scheme and some, egregiously, don't. Among the former: the rebellion of Hermia against a parental authority still powerful and, especially in southern Europe, still backed by the law in 1900. The craftsmen trying to put on a play are archetypal in any setting of any era. Less convincing is the threat of a death sentence for Hermia's defiance, though the alternate punishment of convent confinement is more plausible. Some of Hoffman's inventions fit neither the text nor his updating. Since we already accept the convention that these Italians are speaking Elizabethan English, why does Hoffman have villagers in the background chatter in Italian? When Lysander and Hermia camp down for the night, why does Hermia disrobe in the quickly cooling damp forest? (To add sex to a PG-13 movie, I hear you muttering. But surely a Hollywood producer would never stoop so low!) And, of course, to eliminate even more glaring incongruities, Hoffman has scissored away at the text and so, many verbal enchantments have disappeared. (One mustn't object that Shakespeare must be cut for the screen. Not after Kenneth Branagh's four-hour *Hamlet*.)

But, once the action shifts to the moonlit forest, we begin to discover that Hoffman has something fresh to bring to the play.

Initially startling is how unsupernatural, even flat-footed, the sprites and dryads and fairies seem. When Puck, well played by Stanley Tucci as a lecherous satyr, encounters one of Titania's nymphs, he comes on to her like a spiv trying to pick up a secretary on her lunch hour. A few seconds later, he's urinating against a tree. Oberon and Titania may be less vulgar, yet the fairy Queen, in Michelle Pfeiffer's gracelessly spoken performance, seems middle-class in her shrewishness rather than regally furious, like a Scarsdale matron whose ex-husband has missed his last two alimony payments; while Oberon takes on the manner of an overripe lounge lizard (but, granted this approach, skillfully done by Rupert Everett).

This mundanity is a function not of the director's incompetence but of his strategy. Hoffman sees the fairy world simply as a kingdom in exile, driven into the woods by the triumph of Christianity. These ousted deities, denied the fealty of mortals and confined to a sylvan ghetto, have become clumsy, enervated, aimless, petty, and irritable. (I began to wonder why the wings hadn't dropped off the fairies long ago.) In Shakespeare's text, Titania denies her mate the little page boy because of her regard for her friend, the lad's dead mother. But here, with that motive deemphasized, the real cause of the quarrel seems to be a kind of cabin fever. After sixteen hundred years of exile in a very small forest, Oberon and Titania just can't stand the sight of each other.

It is a severe reduction of Shakespeare's multilayered emotionality, but Hoffman's cleverness often prevails. For instance, being a community of exiles longing for news of home, the fairy folk have smuggled things out of Monte Athena in order to find out what mortals are up to nowadays. Titania may be able to command lightning and rain but she and her nymphs can't work the phonograph filched from the villa of Theseus. When Bottom finally winds the contraption up and plays "Casta Diva," the nymphs look at him with new respect. He may not be the most glamorous lover Titania's ever had, but he sure is a handy guy to have around. (Shakespeare's term for working man, "mechanical," here takes on new meaning.)

The highest compliment I can pay to the characterization of Nick Bottom as redesigned by Hoffman and actor Kevin Kline is also a backhanded one: Having banished Shakespeare's conception from their production, they have contrived a not unworthy substitute. The fellow you encounter in the play—surely Shakespeare's greatest purely comic character, for Falstaff is tragicomic—is a glorious monster of happy fatuity, deaf to all criticism, laving himself in fantasies of theatrical triumph, capable of receiving the amorous caresses of a goddess as but his due. But Kline's weaver, to the contrary, feels himself precariously situated in society (a local star but also a clown to be mocked), and has an all-too-fragile ego. When a mischief-maker pours wine on

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the weaver and ruins his best suit, Kline crumbles and goes home to sulk. (Shakespeare's Bottom would have received the drenching as a tribute: "Lo, how the commonality lauds me in manner Bacchic!") This local-yokel hambone and would-be Lothario of Kline's is a relative of the overgrown boys in Fellini's *I Vitelloni*, tugging at the restraints of small-town life and yearning for a future of sensual bliss or artistic renown. (And Roger Rees's Peter Quince—a lovely, subtle piece of work—seems directly inspired by *Vitelloni*'s Leopoldo, the aspiring poet.) This new characterization, though a reversal of what's in the play, nevertheless works on screen. When Kline is wooed by Titania, he wonderfully conveys a loser's amazement at suddenly winning. The comedy of Shakespeare's weaver is that he gets exactly what he thinks he deserves. But the pathos of Kline's Nick Bottom is that he achieves what he never imagined would come to him.

Whenever the fairies and Bottom aren't together on screen, the movie trudges. I've seen the lovers' spats and the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe work better in college productions than they do here. Above all, what this film lacks is a sense of ritual and mystery. With the special effects now available to any big-budget movie, Hoffman can convey Titania's wrath at her husband with lightning and thunder, but the insipid kiss and quick fade into the distance with which he stages their reconciliation doesn't distill the essence of "Come, my queen, take hands with me,/And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be." Hoffman's cinematic shorthand doesn't rock the ground or us.

Thanks to much of the acting (I also liked David Strathairn's fusspot Theseus and Dominic West's dark, incisive Lysander) and to the director's flashes of invention, this movie is mainly amusing and worth seeing. But check your local video store or library for the BBC's 1982 *Dream*, directed by Elijah Moshinsky and featuring the best Nick Bottom (Brian Glover's) I've ever seen. It's easy to be amused by any moderately well-done production of this play. Dare to be awed. □

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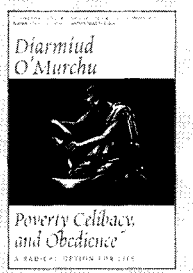

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Summer Reading

Jeffrey Meyers

Jeffrey Meyers, distinguished biographer of Ernest Hemingway and many others, has written about the authors of the other works discussed here in his latest book, Privileged Moments: Encounters with Writers.

This year is Ernest Hemingway's centenary, and his *Complete Short Stories* (Scribners, $29.95, 650 pp.) contains some of his best work. Those who think Hemingway doesn't understand women ought to read "Hills like White Elephants." The imaginative woman in the story is moved by the landscape while the literal-minded man refuses to sympathize with her point of view. As they wait in a train station between Barcelona and Madrid, the egoistic man, unaware of her feelings, tries to bully her into having an abortion (which is never actually mentioned). But the woman is frightened. Everything he says is false; everything she says is ironic. He forces her to consent in order to keep his love, but the very fact of his asking her means she can never love him again. She walks away from him and finds comfort in nature: in the fields of grain, the trees, the river, and the hills beyond. Her peaceful contemplation recalls Psalm 121 as she lifts up her eyes to the hills for help. But her mood is shattered by his persistent argument, which drives her to the edge of a breakdown, and she frantically begs: "Would you please, please, please, please, please, please, please stop talking?" Their anguished encounter signifies the end of something.

Francis King, who has a major reputation in England, deserves to be better known in America. His masterpiece, *Act of Darkness* (Little, Brown, 332 pp.), is a murder novel with philosophical ideas and moral implications. King tells an intriguing story, based on an actual unsolved crime—the murder of a child—and offers his own fictional solution. He writes with considerable style and wit and provides the best description of the atmosphere as well as the landscape of India since his friend E.M. Forster wrote of the subcontinent seventy-five years ago. Most important, King has sharp insight into the moods and motivations of a wide range of disparate and desperate people. A disturbing undercurrent swirls through the book and sucks most of the characters into an almost self-willed destruction. This novel concerns the connection between murderer and victim, the obsession with death and concealment, the nature of evil.

Paul Theroux's greatly underrated *Sir Vidia's Shadow: A Friendship across Five Continents* (Houghton Mifflin, $25, 358 pp.) is about a thirty-year friendship that finally, for complex reasons, went wrong.

Though he criticizes V.S. Naipaul and reveals the dark side of his character at the end of the book, Theroux is, in fact, sympathetic, generous, and full of admiration for his old mentor. Despite all his achievements, Naipaul, as an Indian from Trinidad, has never ceased to feel defensive, insecure, under siege. Theroux's book explains how Naipaul constructed a harsh and apparently invulnerable persona to counter his own sense of inferiority and, by running down all his competitors, to stake his claim to literary greatness. Theroux has written a riveting story of two writers' lives: how they wrote books and won prizes, advanced their careers and achieved fame. He describes their acute sensitivity to criticism, their financial struggles, illnesses, and mental problems, their difficult marriages and tormented love affairs.

After all the darkness and shadows, John Bayley's tender *Elegy for Iris* (St. Martin's, $22.95, 275 pp.) illuminates some obscure aspects of love, fate, and illness. Bayley, a noted critic and professor, met Iris Murdoch at Oxford in 1954 and was happily married to her (they were called "the most intelligent couple in England") for more than forty years. He looks back on their life together through the prism of her Alzheimer's disease, diagnosed in 1994. Their love story has tragic overtones. But he vividly describes their intensified intimacy during her final years (she died, just after the book appeared, in February), when he single-handedly cared for her as she lapsed into a sad but still charming second childhood. His labors are rewarded as he finally, totally, captures as his sole possession the always elusive and sometimes promiscuous Iris. Bayley appeals to readers by suggesting that Alzheimer's can be jolly good fun, and he manages to make senescent love both pleasing and poignant.

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Chet Raymo

Chet Raymo teaches at Stonehill College in Massachusetts and is science columnist for the Boston Globe. *His newest book is* Natural Prayers *(Hungry Mind Press).*

Summer is the time when we promise once again to read Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Of course, what usually happens is we get halfway through *Swann's Way* and then throw Proust over for a ripping John Grisham or Stephen King. But occasionally our literary good intentions find a book upon which they can comfortably rest, something with the literary merit of Proust but wrapped in a more digestible August-sized package.

Such a book is Andrei Makine's autobiographical novel *Dreams of My Russian Summers* (Scribner, $12, 241 pp.). In 1995, the book exploded into prominence by winning both of France's highest literary awards, the Prix Medicis and the Prix Goncourt. The story tells of a young boy growing up in Soviet Siberia with his French-born grandmother, Charlotte Lemonnier. She regales him with tales of late-nineteenth-century Paris, and introduces him to the literary heritage of Balzac, Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Maupassant. In her bedroom is a suitcase filled with papers—letters, newspaper clippings, photographs. These tattered documents become a magic carpet that carries the boy's imagination to a dreamlike France of cultural elegance and sensual pleasure. Against this idealized world on the Seine are posited rumors of Lavrenti Beria, the chief of the Soviet secret police, cruising the shabby streets of Moscow, trolling for pretty women who are pulled into his dark limousine, perhaps never to be seen again.

The boy's summers on the Russian steppe are richly realized; seldom has a coming-of-age story been told with such exquisite refinement. Caught between two languages—French and Russian—the boy imagines a kind of universal language, a "language of amazement," which might capture the longing, the love, the inexpressible ache of memory and desire. In 1987, in the springtime of *perestroika*, Makine, the boy grown up, left Russia for Paris. This memoir of his Russian summers was written in his grandmother's French, but even in English translation it is clear that he has found his "language of amazement." I intend this summer to read Makine's new novel, *Once upon the River Love* (Arcade, $24.95, 256 pp.).

I have also set aside the newest book from another author who has mastered the language of amazement, the American poet Mary Oliver. *Winter Hours: Prose, Prose Poems, and Poems* (Houghton Mifflin, $22, 144 pp.) is a bit of a grab bag of items that have been published elsewhere, but those of us who are addicted to everything Oliver writes appreciate having it brought together every year or so. I haven't been able to resist dipping into the first essay, which recounts Oliver's encounters with carpentry. "I wanted to build, in the other way," she writes, "with the teeth of the saw, and the explosions of the hammer, and the little shrieks of the screws winding down into their perfect nests." That last phase captures the reason we love Mary Oliver—her ability to be astonished by the commonplace. As I read her newest book I will also have at my side my well-thumbed *New and Selected Poems* (Beacon Press, $16, 272 pp.), the indispensable introduction to this most amazed and amazing of American poets.

If in spite of everything you are still resolved to embark upon a summer's reading of Proustian scale, I recommend Robert Latham's *The Shorter Pepys* (University of California Press, $50, 1,152 pp.). I don't know if high school kids today read Samuel Pepys's *Diary*. Back in the 1950s even kids in parochial schools were exposed to bits and pieces—mostly accounts of the Great London Fire of 1666 and the plague. What we saw then was severely edited, as I discovered this past winter when I plowed through the diary, edited and abridged by Latham, with almost ten years' worth of entries and what seemed even in abridgment a zillion words. The fire and the plague are there, but what makes the diary

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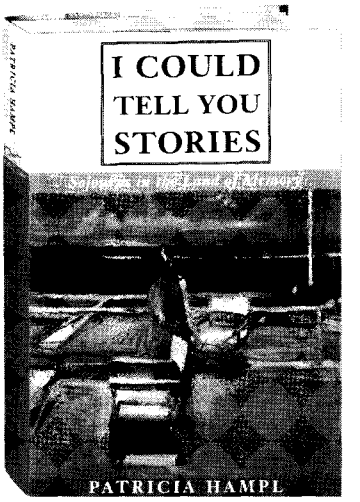

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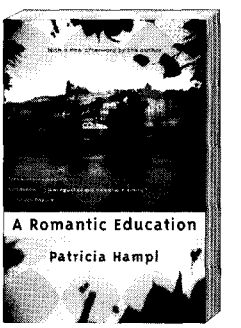

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such compelling reading is its combination of private and public history. Pepys was a man about town who hobnobbed with royalty, nobility, intellectuals, artists, actors and actresses, military men, clergymen and bishops, as well as tarts, boatmen, hackney drivers, and tavern keepers. He might move directly from an audience with the king at Whitehall Palace to a saucy performance by Nell Gwyn at the Duke's theater, from a demonstration at the Royal Society of one of the first blood transfusions to the spectacle of a public execution at Charing Cross. The diary is a portrait of Pepys's age in all of its nuances.

What we read is relevant to any age. Pepys is a man torn between marital fidelity and promiscuity, public integrity and private greed, religious tolerance and self-righteous faith, science and superstition, duty and pleasure. In short, he is Everyman, struggling with universal problems. By about page 800, I was having Pepysian dreams, without being altogether certain whether they were his or my own.

Gabrielle Steinfels

Gabrielle Steinfels lives in Manhattan.

What ever possessed your niece to pierce her navel? Is there a meal to be found on the front lawn? Are you commuting on the military's most extensive weapon? All this and more are revealed by Emily Jenkins while exploring the very exotic everyday worlds around us. *Tongue First: Adventures in Physical Culture* (Henry Holt, $14.95, 224 pp.) contemplates the abstract, the semantics of men's underwear, and the physical—say, how do you go about picking a tattoo? Jenkins is concerned with experiences of the physical and how they define us. (Why that tattoo there?) Admittedly, much of the book's appeal is voyeuristic—I don't want to shave my head, be rolfed, or go without sleep for a week—but watching another walk on the wild side makes for excellent summer reading. The author also explores more mainstream experiences: cosmetic counters, sensory deprivation, nude beaches, and the ultimate physical experience, aging, with enough humor and insight to justify peeping.

Within John McPhee's endless output I recently discovered a collection of biographical essays, *A Roomful of Hovings* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $11, 250 pp.), written in the late 1960s. (I was preliterate at the time, so it's all new to me!) His subjects—Thomas P. F. Hoving, then director of the Metropolitan Museum and former clothing-store floorwalker in men's suits; Euell Theophilus Gibbons, roadside gourmand and author of *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*; Robert Twynam, the man responsible for the lawns at Wimbledon; and Temple Hornaday Fielding of *Fielding's Guides*—are all experts in their respective fields (grass or other). The adventure is in how they got that way.

McPhee's one group biography in the volume, "Fifty-two People on a Continent," focuses on a collection of bright young things sent off to Africa to work as midlevel bureaucrats. Their experiences are epitomized by one Carroll W. Brewster who at age twenty-eight traveled the Sudan collecting records of court and tribal law to compile the first of several issues of *Sudan Law Journal and Reports*, a public, national source of legal precedent for the Sudan. Aside from the pleasure found in these real-life "boy's adventures," the optimistic tone of McPhee regarding Africa's political future is a thought-provoking reminder of how much has been lost in thirty years.

Finally, John R. Stilgoe's *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places* (Walker and Company, $10.95, 187 pp.) will tempt, urge, and incite you to get out of that chair, hop on a bicycle, and take a good look at your own world. *Outside Lies Magic* leads the reader, the "explorer," behind gas stations, under bypasses, and along small-town main streets, all the while pointing out a fascinating range of cultural artifacts: What political and social forces were behind the development of the Military and Interstate Highway System? How is the appeal of the suburban lawn rooted in our country's agrarian past? What is the relationship between fire insurance policies and the classic small-town Main Street?

Now that you are tired of reading about other people's adventures, take a look around, pick an element of your own universe, and wonder out loud how this came to be.

Elizabeth Bartelme

Elizabeth Bartelme, a long-time contributor, lives in New York.

With poetry on the subway and poetry on the buses, poetry is evidently apropos any time, anywhere, and for this astonishing revelation we must give thanks. Nevertheless, reading poetry seems particularly enjoyable in a leisurely summer setting, for it sharpens the mind, exalts the spirit, and leads to a joyous heart. Nowhere is this more evident than in Marie Ponsot's *The Bird Catcher* (Alfred A. Knopf, $22, 96 pp.), a magnificent collection, witty and strong, as in: "This up-slope opens like Adam, and in giant Eden, the mountain's rib lies bare, its arch gashed white...We city people laugh to shrug off awe...pupils awkward with these vast geographies."

"These vast geographies..." opens to us W.S. Merwin's *The Folding Cliffs* (Alfred A. Knopf, $25, 356 pp.), a long narrative poem relating the tragic history of

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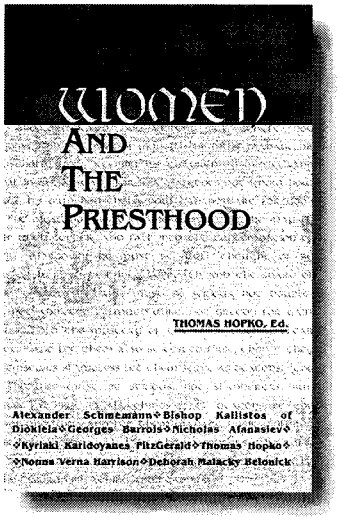
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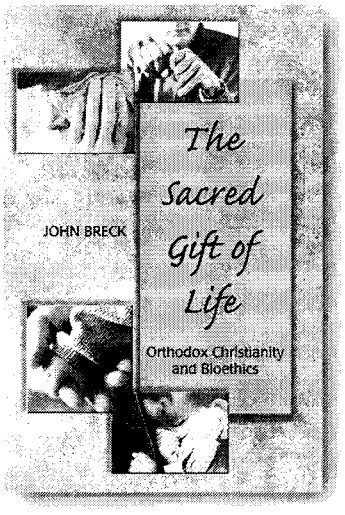

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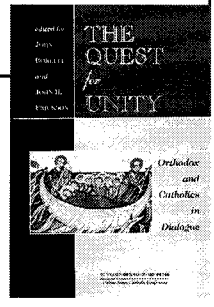

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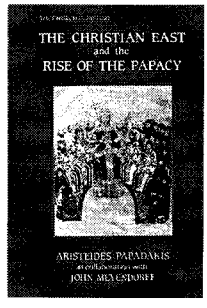

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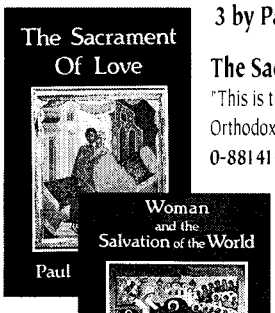

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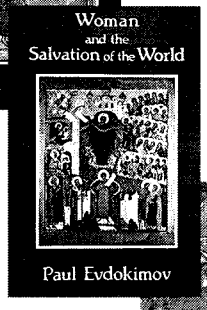

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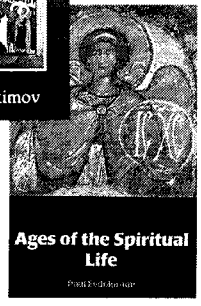

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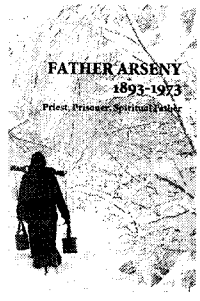

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nineteenth-century Hawaii. Merwin's tale is mesmerizing, and he brings three-dimensional characters to life as a people and as individuals, betrayed by the American and European colonizers and almost destroyed by leprosy, the "separation sickness." Families were torn apart, lovers separated, even children taken away to the leper colony on Molokai. It is a sad tale without a happy ending, but the poem itself is cast in a heroic mold that places it in the company of the great epics. It is truly a brilliant work of art.

To move from Merwin's soaring cliffs and the tropical beauty of the Hawaiian Islands to the teeming streets and back alleys of present-day Jerusalem is a leap well worth taking, if you are taking it with Robert Stone in *Damascus Gate* (Houghton Mifflin, $26, 512 pp.). On the surface this is a novel of suspense, but Stone's literary skill and polished prose make it a great deal more. Most interesting, however, is the moral ambiguity that underlies the story, and that is characteristic of most of the rest of his work as well. A fine novel by a distinguished writer.

No one presents the Irish-American community as well as Alice McDermott. Her latest book, *Charming Billy* (Dell, $12.95, 280 pp.), is the melancholy story of an alcoholic dreamer whose life is ruined as much by his refusal to accept his betrayal by the woman he loved and hoped to marry as by his steady drinking. Everyone loves Billy and talks of his charm and kindness, but he remains attached to his dream and to the fantasy that gave it birth. McDermott handles the tangled relationships and the character of Billy Lynch in a masterly manner, and the book is a fitting addition to her steadily growing canon. *Charming Billy* won the 1999 National Book Award for fiction.

Jonathan Raban has become our Tocqueville, our Crèvecoeur, as he has roamed South and West, riding a Mississippi raft, following railroad lines, and bucketing across the prairie and the plains in his old car. Taking in the United States from an English point of view, he has exerted his considerable curiosity and his appetite for travel to great good effect and has presented his findings to the public in three quite wonderful books: *Bad Land* (Pantheon, $25, 324 pp.), *Hunting Mr. Heartbreak* (Vintage, $13, 375 pp.), and *Old Glory* (Simon & Schuster, $16.95, 420 pp.). The territory Raban has covered allows for plenty of stops and he takes advantage at each to get to know the people who live, for example, on the river banks. In a great imaginative leap he recreates the lives of those intrepid homesteaders who pushed their way through the West, only to lose everything when their crops failed. These books are so delightful, witty, and warm that the stay-at-home traveler can't miss with them.

And, finally, for those who are heading to Europe, *Bed and Breakfasts of Character and Charm in France* (Fodor, $19) is just the ticket. There are color photos of each of the 663 B&Bs, adequate descriptions, an index, and great maps. *Bon voyage*!

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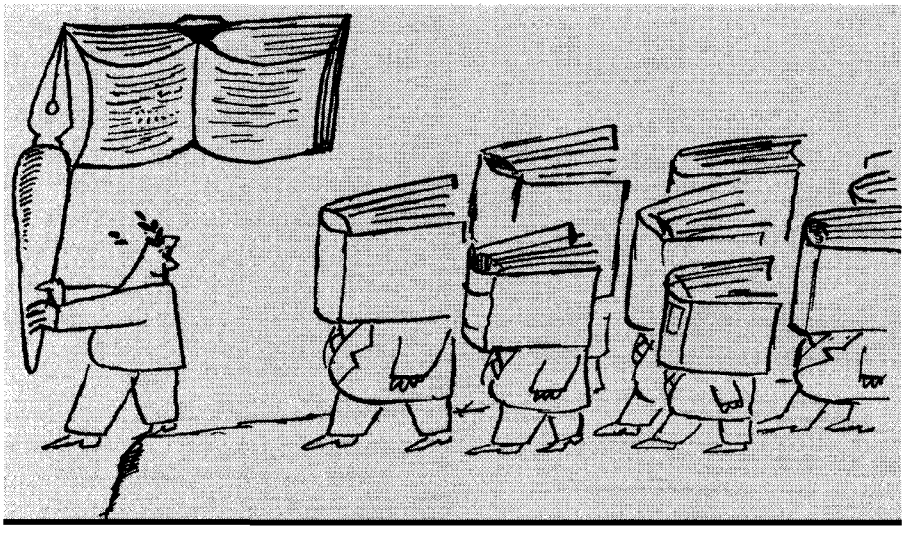
Susan McWilliams

Susan McWilliams, a recent graduate of Amherst College, works as a consultant in New York City.

The turn of the millennium, if nothing else, serves as a marker for social reflection, a time to examine how far we have come, where we are, and where we might be going. Perhaps William Leach did not intend to write a call to arms, but *Country of Exiles* (Pantheon, $24, 273 pp.) resounds like nothing else. Leach argues that America's brilliance has always rested on one equilibrium: the "centrifugal" desire to move on (to the Gold Rush, to the highways) balancing the "centripetal" urge to root (in a profession, in a hometown). In the last three decades, however, that scale has tipped and thrown the country dangerously out of kilter. Businessmen and the vanguard of economic globalization, indifferent to location, have displaced local, regional, and even broader identities. Meanwhile, the nation convinces itself that America, instead of being both an idea and a place, can be simply an idea. This cosmopolitan notion, disdaining provinciality and localism, has obscured more permanent human needs for community, boundaries, home, a resting place. Focusing his inquiry in three telling arenas—transportation, gambling and tourism, and the research university—Leach warns that in losing our sense of place we are losing the things that bind us together. With that, we stand to lose ourselves.

While it trumpets present-day miracles of the marketplace, conventional wisdom holds that Americans are turning from God to Gucci, from church on Sundays to weekends at the mall. Rampant consumerism has indeed weighed on religion but not dissolved it, as Richard Cimino and Don Lattin explore in *Shopping for Faith* (Jossey-Bass, $25, 240 pp.). According to polls, 95 percent of Americans believe in God; they just believe in private. They seek the divine as they search for bargain wardrobes, using eclectic bits and pieces to furnish a personal spiritual style. Cimino and Lattin examine these and other facets of the nation's changing religious sense, offering predictions that do not, in fact, sound so unfamiliar. Baby boomers and Gen X-ers, searching for community, will rediscover traditional faith. Others will make sense of reason and revelation by mixing them in an "experiential spirituality" reminiscent of Thoreau, devoting themselves to nature and personal reflection. New types of religious organizations will emerge in the form of megachurches on one end and "grassroots" spiritual gatherings on the other. Cimino and Lattin's book, although at times too self-conscious by including main ideas in bold print and a companion CD-ROM, presents an engaging overview of where, when, and how Americans believe today, and what



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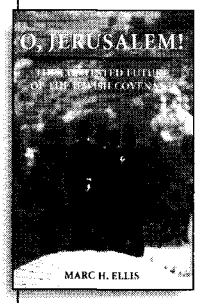

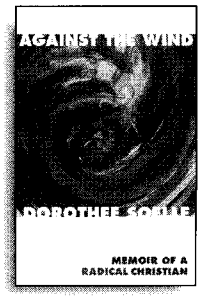

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that implies for the coming years.

And, as always, foreign voices, speaking of foreign places, can tell us something about our own homestead. In Monika Fagerholm's *Wonderful Women by the Sea* (New Press, $15.95, 330 pp.), translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate, two families drift toward tomorrow from their neighboring summer cottages. Angels come to the summer paradise, carrying the future in a Chevrolet Chevelle. Angels depart, and the shine of the beach dulls. The intricate intersection of the lives here paces the intersection of cultures, of a relaxing past and a restless future. As Tupperware mothers make way for space children, and humans ascend to the moon, even beautiful women imagine more promised lands than Eden. Some will stay, some will go, some will come back, and some will be left behind. With a stunning ability to find meaning in the everyday, Fagerholm manages the complicated emotional relationships of a small community over the course of ten years. The scenario is further distorted by the demands of swift change: Every member of every family, pressed in a dwindling sanctuary, fights to come to terms with the encroaching outside world. Most impressive are the children, Thomas and Renee, through whose eyes Fagerholm watches a turbulent decade drench the most untouchable shores.

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James J. Uebbing

James J. Uebbing, editor of Robert Lax's Love Had a Compass: Journals & Poetry *(Grove Press), reviews books for* Kirkus.

A classmate of mine from graduate school has recently published a novel—which, I hasten to point out, I have not yet read—describing the life of an elderly Manhattan fop who goes to parties for a living. Reviewing novels is a similar enterprise in many ways, and not just because both activities are usually intended and pursued as recreations rather than careers. The novel is an intensely personal literary form, after all; even more so than poetry, novels operate through the gradual revelation of personality, and they usually succeed or fail precisely to the degree that they compel a sense of fascination—rather than agreement or awe—in the reader.

A hundred novels read at random, therefore, will usually be remembered like a hundred people met at a large party: a few will be quite offensive, many will be boring, the great majority will be decent but utterly forgettable, and several will be quite nice. But, of necessity, the most interesting ones will usually be the oddest. These will not often become friends, but they will stay in your mind and will go the furthest toward convincing you that the evening was not entirely a waste of time.

While most people look forward to holidays as a time to catch up on their reading, I look forward to doing a little rereading. As a book reviewer, I read two-hundred-odd novels a year. On va-

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cation I usually take five or six for a second reading. This year I have four. I have already described in these pages [April 9] Hwee Hwee Tan's *Foreign Bodies* (Persea, $24, 284 pp.), so I will simply mention it here as a perfect example of the sort of book I am speaking of. Tan's account of deceit and salvation within the orderly hell of Singapore is remarkable not so much for its story as for its telling, which is arresting largely because of the narrator's sure and certain—and, I believe, quite credible—conviction that she is describing the literal enactment of God's will as it is played out at the bar of a criminal court.

The voice of God also figures prominently in Lawrence Cosse's witty thriller, *A Corner of the Veil* (Scribner, $23, 272 pp.), which became a best seller when it was first published in France two years ago. Cosse questions both the meaning and the ramifications of religious faith by envisioning its demise—not through gradual apostasy, but as a result of the sudden discovery of an irrefutable proof of God's existence. As the proof (discovered by a latitudinarian Jesuit editor) quickly spreads, the government becomes alarmed at the loss of fear (and ambition) among its citizens—including the prime minister, who abandons politics and takes up gardening—and works out an uneasy alliance with the church (which finds itself equally alarmed at the prospect of its own irrelevance in a converted world) to halt the swelling tide of belief.

The quieter dramas of family life are at the heart of James Purdy's *Gertrude of Stony Island Avenue* (Morrow, $19.95, 144 pp.) and Julie Myerson's *Me and the Fat Man* (Ecco, $23.95, 224 pp.). But neither family is exactly sedate, and both of them are haunted across the span of many years by a dead woman: in Purdy's work the rebellious daughter of an eccentric and staid Chicago couple, and in Myerson's story the hippie mother of an emotionally unhinged Englishwoman. Purdy's mother and Myerson's daughter both leave their husbands to uncover the mysteries behind their griefs, which has, of course, as much to do with themselves as with the dead.

The real disappointment with contemporary fiction is that most of its practitioners seem to have lost their nerve. The writing programs come in for a good deal of criticism in this regard, and it is true that the workshops tend to prize a peculiar style—simultaneously overwrought and bloodless—as proof of a "literary" sensibility, but much of the blame rests with the publishers, editors, and (alas!) the critics themselves, who seem to have worked out their peace with the *status quo* and prefer more of the same. Originality is brash and often somewhat deranged. The original author, like the tipsy guest who seems to have crashed the party and has no one to talk to, will tend to grab your arm and try not to let go until he has finished his story. Usually you can get away in a minute or two if you ask where the bathroom is or shake the ice cubes in the bottom of your glass. But sometimes you will have to hear him out to the end, when you will discover that you were interested after all. □

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

So what do I want, mercy or justice? Well, it is mercy that I need, and mercy is our hope and the promise that has been made to us as Christians, I believe. I look forward to a twenty-four-hour prayer vigil for racial reconciliation that we at the Minnehaha United Church of Christ in Minneapolis will be undertaking as part of a year-long vigil organized by the Minnesota Council of Churches.

BOB MALLES
Saint Paul, Minn.

Categorical imperatives

Bruce Russett's "Is NATO's War Just?" [May 21] is commendable, but it does not go far enough in assessing the Kosovo conflict through the just-war criteria. In particular, it does not interpret the *jus in bello* principle of discrimination in a stringent enough manner, and it evades the *jus ad bellum* precept of right intention, which to my mind is the nub of the matter.

Assume what I think is obvious: that there is a just cause for NATO's going to war in Kosovo, in light of Slobodan Milosevic's genocidal aims and actions. Given that, what does the *in bello* principle of discrimination demand? Certainly it demands that noncombatants not be intentionally targeted, but it demands more: that the tactics employed fit this just intention. But this is precisely not the case. By bombing legitimate targets of military importance at a "safe distance"—meaning one that reduces to near zero the possibility of incurring NATO casualties—NATO has made massive "collateral damage" virtually certain. Such bombing is indiscriminate in practice, if not in intention. To persist in such tactics not only punishes primarily those with whom NATO has no legitimate gripe—the Serbian citizenry, rather than the Milosevic regime—but it actually works against the aim of forcing Milosevic to comply with international law and withdraw from Kosovo. The bombing has given Milosevic cover for accelerating the ethnic cleansing, ample rhetorical resources for his radical nationalist platform, and has crippled any effective resistance to Milosevic from within Serbia. Thus the bombing is not only indiscriminate, it is disproportionate as well.

This raises another question: given the lack of fit between aims and tactics, one may ask "what is the ultimate goal of the war?" As a means of forcing Milosevic's compliance, the bombing was not only a failure, but a predictable one. If rectifying the injustice in Kosovo was indeed the goal, then a massive invasion of ground troops, with the ultimate strategy of driving the Serbs from Kosovo and perhaps defeating the Milosevic regime (with all that implies: protracted occupation of Kosovo, setting up a Serbian protectorate, and so on), was clearly necessary. Either that, or intervention should have been forgone altogether. Why adopt a strategy doomed to fail? Perhaps because justice in Kosovo was never the goal to begin with. When one assumes that the NATO bombing was a matter of "preserving credibility" rather than stopping genocide, the strategy makes perfect sense: by flexing its military muscle, NATO visibly remains a power to be reckoned with. It might then be able to live with its failure to intervene at an earlier time, when there was a more "reasonable hope of success" at a much more acceptable cost and level of risk. But this makes the intentions of NATO unacceptable to the moral tradition of the just war. "Saving face" is not a policy aim that justifies killing on a grand scale.

MICHAEL J. QUIRK
Bellerose, N.Y.

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'STUD MUFFINS,' MORMON STYLE

Judy Ringle

When I was riding my bike to campus I saw two guys headed my way, walking down the sidewalk in a residential area. Dressed in tidy black slacks, immaculate white shirts, conservative neckties, each carrying a well-worn dark-bound book, even at half a block away, I recognized who they were and what they were up to.

I hailed them warmly: "Good morning, Elders!" And with huge smiles and great gusto, they returned the greeting, "Good morning, good morning!"

They were, of course, young men on mission with the Mormon church, visiting Corvallis for an extended period to go door-to-door spreading the word about their faith. That takes the kind of nerve I couldn't work up if I tried for a year. But I love people who are in the fires of a spiritual quest, so of course I smiled and waved.

I have always liked these guys. They get the door slammed in their face, they get cussed out, and yet they remain endlessly courteous, with bounteous good humor. Mormons are famous for their good-neighborliness, hearty energy, and general all-around, clean-cut demeanor. They have radio and TV commercials that take a stand for decency and compassion, and they comb their hair. They make our nice Catholic kids look rather scruffy by comparison. I like 'em.

And I found myself recalling a day in late autumn, some years ago, when our two oldest daughters were teen-agers They were at home alone, and two elders came to the door. Our daughters engaged them in conversation for a considerable time. The elders said they would come into the house only when we, the parents, were at home, and indeed they did.

In the parlance of the girls at the time, these guys were "stud muffins." Hunks. And the nicest guys you'd ever hope to meet. Of course, as elders, they had serious business, and they withdrew with our kids downstairs into the family room to discuss their faith. One visit ended about dinner time and we invited them to dine with the family. They were most grateful for the free food.

This was the first of several visits and sharing of table, and always, either before or after dinner, the elders went into the family room to counsel with our teen-aged daughters. It sounded to us a lot like kids just having fun, whooping it up.

Now, I don't know if this is true or not, but our daughters told us several things. According to them, while the elders were on a mission, they were refraining from certain things, like, they didn't listen to rock records. But, said our teen angels, they apparently were not refraining from playing footsie under the dinner table. Well-balanced youths, those.

When Christmas came around, we invited the elders to have Christmas dinner with our family, and our daughters—knowing full well the mischief they were making—gave them a Christmas present: Billy Joel's recording of "Uptown Girl."

Bad girls, we said. Bad, bad girls. The poor guys aren't supposed to listen to pop music; you are very wicked. The elders opened their present in the family room, and shortly after we were surprised to hear Billy Joel: "Uptown girl..." (boom boom). Turns out that the elders had expressed concern that our kids might have spent their hard-earned allowances on a record that was defective, and to be sure that it was not, it would only be prudent to test it. They tested it about twenty times, and—admit it—everybody danced. To do otherwise, explained the elders soberly, would be to dishonor their hostesses.

Then one night, the session in the family room was going on longer than usual and the voices were muffled. Suddenly, our eldest daughter whooshed up the stairs and came leaping into the kitchen, "Mom! Dad! When the elders come upstairs, just agree with everything they say!"

What? What? "Well, the guys said that they had been wondering for a long time why we were all nice to them, and we told them that actually, we are Mormons."

"What?"

"Yeah"—(breathless, fast)—"we told 'em that we are a Mormon 'Test House,' to be sure that the elders are behaving themselves on missions, and that this is a big secret. Nobody ever tells the elders about the test houses."

Before we could gather our wits, our other daughter and the two elders romped into the kitchen, laughing hysterically "Wow, the elders said, wow, wow, wow!" They pumped my husband's hand energetically, beaming, and before they left, we shook hands all around, saying things like "So, how about that!" and "Oh, my!" and "Well, well, well!"

"Wow," they said when they left, still laughing, "wow."

The visits continued throughout their mission, with nothing more said about our being a test house, and we all hugged when it was time for them to leave Corvallis.

A couple of years later, one of the two hunks returned with pictures of his wife and baby. I didn't ask if they had really believed our very bad daughters. All I know is, it was a lovely episode, and when I saw those two guys on the sidewalk, I really meant it: "Good morning, Elders, great good morning. Just watch out for those test houses with the very bad girls." □

Judy Ringle *lives in Corvallis, Oregon. This article first appeared in the Oregon State University* Daily Barometer.

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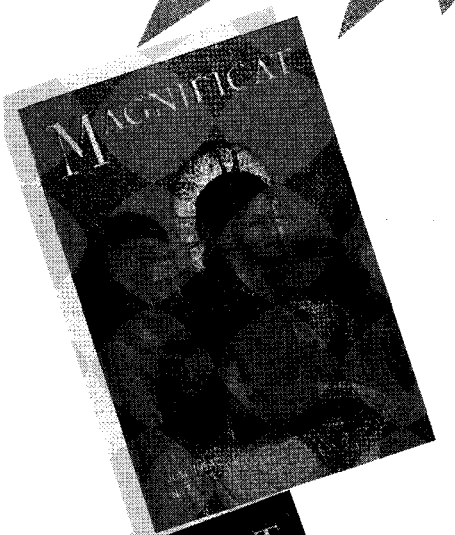

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